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To cite this article: Imron Rosidi (2021): Being active Muslim audiences: reception of Thai films in Indonesia, Media Asia, DOI: [10.1080/01296612.2021.1947620](https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.1947620)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.1947620>



Published online: 11 Jul 2021.



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Being active Muslim audiences: reception of Thai films in Indonesia

IMRON ROSIDI 

Most studies on media in Indonesia have tended to support the concept of passive audiences. This article aims to explain the reception of young Muslims in Thai films. Thai films are consumed by young Indonesian Muslims recently. The research question proposed is how these Muslim audiences respond and interpret messages and representations of Thai films and the extent to which their Islamic background affects this reception. This article employs interviews and observations to gather data. This study finds that the consumption of young Indonesian Muslims in Thai films supports the concept of active audiences because audiences can select those products based on their interest. These more active audiences use laptops or mobile phones to watch Thai films they like. Furthermore, Indonesian youth do not passively receive all representations of Thai films. This study recommends two points. First, in this global era, the restrictions of consumption on foreign cultural products, both from religious and state authority, are unnecessary. This is because audiences can select and negotiate representations of cultural products. Second, television stations need to provide a new medium in which audiences can actively choose television programs based on their own schedule, not a fixed schedule decided by the television producer.

KEYWORDS: Thai films; young Muslims; Indonesia; active audiences

Globalization has supported the diversity of cultural products coming to Indonesia. Some cultural products such as films, television dramas and music from several countries have entered Indonesia facilitated by digital technology. In this case, the coming of Thai films in Indonesia is evident when globalization has easily allowed individuals to consume transnational cultural products easily. This can be seen from Thai films on YouTube, which can be accessed anytime and anywhere by Indonesian audiences. Thai films are occasionally screened on Indonesian televisions.

The films shown on YouTube are free and open for consumption. While on television, these films must contend with other films from Indonesia, Korea, Hong Kong, and the USA to get a slot.

Several articles discussing transnational cultural products in Indonesia have not discussed Indonesian audiences' reception to Thai films. Several articles that examine the reception of global cultural products in Indonesia are Tambunan (2015), Koike (2002), Rosidi and Khotimah (2020), and Setijadi (2005). Tambunan (2015) provides insightful analysis on how Korean TV dramas have

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created a space for Indonesian audiences to make sense of their life conditions while watching Korean TV dramas. Rosidi and Khotimah (2020) explain that young Indonesian Muslims negotiate Islamic representations of Korean TV dramas. Setijadi (2005) criticizes the cultural proximity concept to explain the reason behind the acceptance of East Asian TV drama fans among local audiences. He suggests in-depth audience research to reveal the resonances of local audiences' experiences while watching cultural products. Inspired by the above studies, this article will be focused on Thai films' reception among young Indonesian Muslims. Indonesian young Muslims are selected as the samples of this study because they engage with cultural commodities and actively relate them with their own everyday lives (Tambunan, 2015, p. 79). When young Indonesian Muslims consume Thai films, they interpret them based on their individual's life and own experiences to make them sensible and understandable (Livingstone, 1992). This means that their Muslim identity and Islamic culture can affect their reception of such cultural products. Some young Indonesian Muslims have been consuming Thai films even though the values disseminated on these products might differ from their local values. Indonesia has been known to have the largest Muslim population globally (Madinier, 2011, p. 23), which is culturally different from Thailand. Thailand is populated by Buddhism adherents (Knodel et al., 1999). Orthodox Islamic values provide these Muslim youth in Indonesia to conduct particular behavior and keep Islam's normative character (Nilan, 2006, p. 92). Thus, studying the reception of Thai films among young Indonesian Muslims indicates that Thai films are responded to and interpreted through the above young Indonesian Muslim's culture and experiences. They are generally preached with Islamic values to improve their spirituality (Rijal, 2020). The growth of da'wah (Islamic preaching) targeted to young Indonesian Muslims goes hand in hand with their consumption of Thai films.

Furthermore, as a close neighbor, Thailand has a cultural production consumed by Indonesian Muslim

youth. There has been a tendency to research cultural products from "advanced" or "central" countries rather than "periphery" countries' cultural products. This article aims to reduce such study patterns. This is because globalization has supported the proliferation of cultural products from any country to be consumed by anyone. The emergence of Thai films marked a shift in consumption among Muslim youth in Indonesia. Globalization has created opportunities for "peripheral" countries to compete with "central" countries in various sectors, especially cultural products. Even so, their products still exist, but their dominance is starting to wane. In Muslim Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, the rise of cultural products from peripheral countries sits alongside the abundance of Western cultural products available through television, radio, cinema, billboards, online sites, and mobile phones. The cultural flow from Thailand to Indonesia is "an example of the decentralizing multiplicity of global media flows" (Youna, 2008, p. 3).

Most studies on media in Indonesia have tended to support the concept of passive audiences or readers. Sari (2016), for instance, argues that the *Cosmogirl!* Print media in Indonesia spreads western cultural values that encourage young Indonesian readers to follow that culture. Malik (2014) also argues that globalization has driven the growth of global cultural products in Indonesia. He even claims that these cultural products disseminate foreign values, and then audiences accept these values.

On the other hand, Yuri et al. (2020) argue that Indonesian audiences passively receive all representations of Japanese cultural products shown on Indonesian television. This study then attempts at opposing the above studies. The above studies address that audiences are passive actors who receive foreign values without rejection and negotiation. In fact, "there are times when viewers are passive, and times when they are active" (Gorton, 2009, p. 34).

This article seeks to know the reception of young Indonesian Muslims to Thai films. The research question is how these Muslim audiences respond and interpret messages and representations of Thai films and the extent to which their Islamic background affects this reception. This study argues

that the consumption of young Indonesian Muslims in Thai films supports the active position of Indonesian audiences. This is because they can select those products based on their interest. Furthermore, Indonesian youth do not passively receive all representations of Thai films. They are not passive audiences who receive all the information from the media. Instead, there is a process of rejection and acceptance. They receive some information or messages that they think do not conflict with their values. However, they also reject values that hold them incompatible with what they believe. Thus, this article assumes that the consumption of Thai films is an active process.

Furthermore, the acceptance of young Muslims toward Thai films shows the openness of the Muslim community in Indonesia to cultural products from foreign countries. This acceptance strengthens Indonesian society's tradition several centuries ago in which they were open to interacting with other communities through trade.

Theoretical framework

A reception study focuses on the audience engagement and experience of media products. This article assumes that audiences are active viewers. Media products are not powerful to influence audiences through their messages and representations. Instead, audiences make sense of what they watch based on their values and everyday experiences. The notion of an active audience regards that audiences are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from their own cultural context. This is developed in reaction to the view that watching television programmes is a passive activity – in other words, audiences will accept the “cultural texts” transmitted via television programmes without question. However, such perception is not accurate; instead, audiences are active creators of meaning concerning television programmes. They negotiate and do not simply accept the meanings sent by cultural texts (Barker, 2000, p. 216).

Ang (1991, pp. 2–3) argues that audiences remain exceptionally complicated to identify,

attract and maintain due to their active position. For her, there is a profound difference between daily practice and official discourse regarding the audience. In everyday life, watching television programmes brings about multiple informal activities such as eating, drinking a glass of tea, reading books, and others. Furthermore, different uses, interpretations, pleasures, disappointments, and compromises among audiences are involved when consuming television programmes. She has regarded the need to control the audience from the cultural producers as the institutional point of view. It is explicitly aimed at facilitating their ambition to get the audience. The television programme is the main instrument for getting a maximum audience. Even though producers always try to keep their television programmes interesting, it is not easy to attract the attention of their audiences. The institutions or producers must “desperately seek the audience.” Storey (2003) also rejects the notion of passive audiences. He believes that the messages disseminated by media will not be quickly injected into the consumers.

In this case, the media do not have unavoidably straight, tremendous, and influential effects on their audience. This article rejects an idea based on the perspective that audiences create certain behaviors after receiving certain media stimuli. The notion of an active audience regards that audiences are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from their cultural context. Furthermore, the current development of media has supported the active engagement of audiences in consuming cultural products. Berg and Wilson (2016, p. 220) state:

In today's multiplatform media environment, the accessibility of screen culture has innovated the ways and means of viewing media. From the ubiquity of personal computers and laptops, where access to the internet is a click away, to the portability of smartphones with a wide array of applications that generate and convey media, screen culture has become a diverse and variegated part of everyday life.

These more active audiences use laptops or mobile phones to watch the films they like. The use of a new medium like laptops and smartphones encourages a variety of ways of viewing films. Staiger (2000) called the diversity of the way the audience watches the film as a “perverse spectator.” These audiences can freely choose the films they like to watch. Jenkin calls the variety of cultural product choices available in multiple digital media “convergence culture” (Jenkins, 2006).

Research methods

This article is based on field research. I employ a qualitative research methodology in this study. Takashi (2010) argues that qualitative methods using interview and observation have emerged against the dominant methodological approaches in media reception studies. Qualitative methods are utilized in this study to reveal the diversity of the audience’s media interpretations. There are fifteen youth interviewed in-depth, so that semi-structured interviews are

employed. Youth are selected based on the purposive sampling technique. Those who love consuming Thai films are chosen as informants. I choose informants who love consuming Thai films employing snowball methods of friendship links. They are also selected based on their Muslim identity. This identity is helpful to know their interpretation based on their Muslim values toward representations of Thai films. The interviews include questions ranging from audiences’ general film consumption habits, favorite films, characters in the films, representations of Islamic values in the films, and reasons behind their consumption of the films compared to Western ones. Observation is done to know how they watch these films. The observation was conducted for seven months, from January to July 2019, in two cities, Pekanbaru and Padang. The detailed information about informants is provided in the following table:

There are more male informants than females because males consume many more violent films than females (Fabregat, 2000). In this case, Thai

No	Name	Gender	Age	City	Length of interview	Length of observation
1	Nadia	Female	22	Padang	1–2 hours	Two weeks
2	Ridlo Fadli	Male	23	Padang	1–3 hours	Two weeks
3	Desi	Female	21	Padang	2 hours	Two weeks
4	Anto	Male	21	Padang	2 hours	Two weeks
5	Anjas	Male	21	Padang	2 hours	Two weeks
6	Alam	Male	22	Padang	3 hours	Two weeks
7	Intan	Female	21	Padang	2 hours	Two weeks
8	Sinta	Female	22	Pekanbaru	1–2 hours	Two weeks
9	Rahma	Female	22	Pekanbaru	1–2 hours	Two weeks
10	Ikhsan	Male	21	Pekanbaru	3 hours	Two weeks
11	Muslim	Male	23	Pekanbaru	3 hours	Two weeks
12	Reza	Male	22	Pekanbaru	2 hours	Two weeks
13	Siska	Female	23	Pekanbaru	3 hours	Two weeks
14	Rudi	Male	24	Pekanbaru	1–2 hours	Two weeks
15	Wati	Female	22	Pekanbaru	1–2 hours	Two weeks

films, especially ghost films, represent violence in which most females do not like to watch them. Patriarchal culture also affects women's openness in proposing opinion. Indonesian females tend not to speak frankly, especially regarding sensitive religious issues. However, in Indonesian culture, females and males have the same opportunity to watch films they like.

The length of interview and observation described in the table refers to the activity of the interview and observation conducted. It means that a respondent can be interviewed more than once. Furthermore, the above length of the interview is not fixed or relative. It might be less or more than the above length of the interview. The length of observation stated above does not mean that the observation is done in two weeks. It means that the observation can be done twice or more within two weeks. Data collected from interview and observation are studied based on the reception analysis. It deals with the making meaning process done by the audiences when they consume Thai films. Reception analysis is used to see and understand responses, acceptance, attitudes, and meanings produced or shaped by audiences (Ida, 2014) on Thai films.

Indonesian culture: a brief explanation

Indonesia is a Muslim state but not an Islamic state. It means that 88% (about 200 million) of Indonesian people are Muslims (Mujani & Liddle, 2004, p. 110). Its state foundation is not Islam but *Pancasila* (five basic principles). Nevertheless, culturally Islam has been influential in Muslim's everyday lives. This influence can be seen from the presence of Islamic symbols in the Indonesian public sphere. Fealy (2008, p. 15) describes "the number of mosques and the size of their congregations has increased sharply, as have the popularity of Islamic dress and the use of Islamic symbols and language in the media and public spaces."

Although Islam is influential in Muslim's daily lives, Islam in Indonesia is different from Islam in other places in the world (Azra, 2010, p. 83). This distinction can be seen primarily from the cultural

accommodation of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous beliefs. The cultural accommodation of Islam and indigenous beliefs can be found in the *Selametan*. This tradition is not found in Saudi Arabia, but Indonesian Muslims practise it. Indonesian Muslims also believe in the existence of ghost. This ghost has several terms such as *memedi*, *lelembut* and *tuyul* (Geertz, 2013, p. 9).

The growth of Islam in the Indonesian cultural field is not monolithic. Instead, it indicates the plurality of its "ideological positions in the public sphere" (Weintraub, 2011, p. 5). Indonesia has multiple Islamic organizations which may bring different Islamic ideology. One, for instance, can identify the presence of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. These two organizations are "the organisational giants in Indonesian Islam" (Pringle, 2010, p. 114). The former represents traditionalist Muslims who still accommodate some local traditions into their Islamic practices. The latter, however, represents modernist Muslims who rejects such traditions to be practised. However, both the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have several Muslim leaders called *Kiai*. These *Kiais* have a religious authority to interpret Islamic texts such as the Qur'an and Hadith into a social context.

Padang and Pekanbaru

Indonesia has many Islands. However, there are some big and famous Islands in Indonesia. Two of them are the Javanese and Sumatra Islands. Padang and Pekanbaru are cities located in Sumatra Island. There are eight provinces in Sumatra Island, namely West Sumatra, North Sumatra, Riau, Bangka Belitung, South Sumatra, Bengkulu, Lampung, and Jambi. Padang is the capital city of West Sumatra province, while Pekanbaru is the capital city of Riau province.

Pekanbaru is known as the center of Malay tradition in Indonesia. Some terms coming from Arabic, such as *Adab*, *Sejarah*, and others, are found in Malay vocabularies. Even Malay transcripts are identical to Arabic transcripts. Unsurprisingly, a Malay person who is not Muslim is considered that his or her Malay identity is

questionable. Padang is a home for the Minangkabau people. Their culture is strongly influenced by Islam, so that “in the Indonesian context, Islam and the Minangkabau are two inseparable entities” (Yahya et al., 2020). As a result, young Muslims being informants in this study are close to Islamic values since they live and stay in Pekanbaru and Padang.

Padang and Pekanbaru are fast-growing cities in various aspects, including the socio-religious aspect. In this article, it can be explained that the dynamics of modernity and globalization influence the Islamization that occurred in public spaces in Padang and Pekanbaru. The development of modernity triggers several actors to negotiate and compromise to enable Islam to engage in debates in the public sphere. In fact, in the public sphere, modernity also accommodated Islam. The debate, negotiation, and accommodation of Islam and modernity are undeniable forms of the ideals of every Muslim to display their Islamic character and modernity.

The debate and accommodation of Islam in the public sphere in these two cities are currently emerging. Recently, in Padang, non-Muslim female students have been forced to wear the *hijab* (veil) by the principal's state school, causing critical responses from the Indonesian government in Jakarta (Rozie, 2021). In Pekanbaru, the da'wah (Islamic proselytizing) has been intensively conducted by Muslim preachers systematically (Rosidi & Khotimah, 2020). These provide an understanding that Islamization is done continuously in these two cities. However, this Islamization is intertwined with the influx of foreign cultural products through unprecedented media globalization.

From TV to multiple digital media platforms

Asia has the largest population globally; however, the exchange of media and pop-cultural products between the countries in the region is not very active. This is not to say that there is no cultural traffic in Asia. The historical context of Asian cultural traffic can be traced back to the “puppet story” (*Cerita Wayang*) in Indonesia. Most stories

and characters depicted are closely similar to Indian mythology. “*Ramayana*” and “*Mahabharata*” are the best examples here. Some characters in “*Mahabharata*,” such as Arjuna and Yudistira, are still popular amongst Indonesians. This indicates that there was cultural traffic from India to Indonesia long before the rise of global media. Therefore, nowadays, Indian television dramas titled “*Mahabharata*” and “*Ramayana*” on Indonesian television do not provide many elements of “foreignness” amongst Indonesian consumers, thus provoking their interest in consuming these Indian television dramas.

“Inter-Asian Cultural Exchange” can be observed as a transnational phenomenon that has already been established before the rise of Thai films in Indonesia. Such cultural exchanges are evident in the coming of Hong Kong films, Taiwanese pop music, Japanese manga and anime, and Korean TV dramas into several Asian countries. This remark indicates that the previous transnational Asian media network between Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan provides an easy way for popularizing other Asian cultural products. The reason behind this indicator is explained in the following sentences. First, the Asian cultural flow was well-established as early as the beginning of the 20th century, allowing a faster and smoother cultural product flow (The Korea Herald, 2008, p. 93). Second, Hong Kong had previously emerged as the center of Cantonese and Mandarin films till the 1990s, in which Taiwan transpired as the “new” core of Mandarin pop culture (Chua, 2012). Third, the existing and consolidated East Asian pop culture production and distribution network, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, facilitates regional infrastructure development to distribute Thai films.

However, the distribution of Thai films in Indonesia recently does not depend on the television broadcast. The pioneering role of television in spreading global cultural products has been challenged by the emergence of online networks, which provides free information on global films and access to them, i.e. to watch online or download. The presence of digital media platforms such as

YouTube further opens the coming of global cultural products, including Thai films in Indonesia. Audiences, for the first time, recognize Thai films on YouTube. Rudi, an informant, said “I fell in love with consuming Thai films after I watched them on YouTube. I do not remember the title, but since then, I have started watching Thai films intensively” (Rudi, personal communication, 5 February 2019).

After they consume from YouTube, they actively search for some other exciting titles—using search engines such as Google, Indonesian young Muslims type some keywords such as “interesting Thai films” to know further about them. Some Thai films are available on YouTube, but some are not. This encourages young Muslims to look for downloadable video links. Some of the illegal links provide them to download Thai movies easily via laptop. After being downloaded, these films are usually watched by them and distributed to their friends. Their friends typically use flash drives to store downloaded films. This created a friendship-based Thai film lover network. This network of friends allows them to exchange Thai films for watching.

Usually, after receiving or downloading these films and storing them on a flash disk, they use laptops to watch the films. The reception of Thai films through laptops has different characteristics from that on television. Watching Thai films on their laptops involves more active engagement because audiences can select and choose the films they want to watch. Using their laptops, they can stop their consumption in the middle of scenes anytime because they can continue consuming the film in the future.

The multiple cultural products available on YouTube and other internet links can be freely consumed by Muslim youth in Indonesia. Their active consumption on these digital platforms also does not require a fixed schedule. It is different when they watch TV programs on television. They must consume them based on the fixed schedule decided by the television producer. The flexibility of their current consumption of Thai films can be

seen from Alam’s statement. He said “I started to love Thai films when I first watched a Thai film titled “Ong Bak” on television. At that time, I was consuming it on television together with my family. Now, I do not use television to consume Thai films because television has a fixed schedule which sometimes clashes with other activities on my schedule” (Alam, personal communication, 15 June 2019).

The above narrative indicates that television is no longer the dominant form of media to watch Thai films, and in Alam’s case, he watches most Thai films from his laptop. This instrument was not only used for consuming Thai films but it was also used for his studies in the university. Furthermore, his connection with Thai films is not limited to television but extends to digital video files, CDs, and DVDs. In Pekanbaru and Padang, they are abundant and can easily be found. Furthermore, television is not as mobile as a laptop as televisions are bigger and heavier. Laptops are easier to carry around because they are lighter. In fact, most of the youth in Pekanbaru and Padang who stay in rental houses are mobile. They commonly move from one rental house to another. They can move twice a year since they look out for a comfortable rental house and the cheapest one. As a result, these youth do not need things that are difficult to carry around.

There are some main issues why they consume Thai films on their laptops. First, Thai films are rarely screened on Indonesian television channels. Secondly, Thai films are already available in more accessible formats such as CD or files downloaded from the internet. Furthermore, the presence of advertisements on television disrupts their enjoyment. Finally, the mobile lifestyle of Pekanbaru youth made the television less attractive than its more mobile alternatives. In this case, the development of modern communication has supported the spread of more diverse media in which television, as one of the contemporary media, has been challenged by other media that are preferred by youth for their mobility.

Negotiating representations on Thai films

Young Indonesian Muslims identify Thai actors' faces similar to Indonesian ones. The similarity of faces between Thai people and Indonesians is common. This supports the interest of young Muslim audiences to consume these films. This marks the cultural closeness between Thai and Indonesian people. Rudi stated: "However, I was surprised at that time because I think it was an Indonesian film ... their faces are similar to ours" (Rudi, personal communication, February 5, 2019).

The concept of cultural proximity explains the closeness of culture or cultural similarity expected to encourage audience interest in watching or consuming transnational cultural products (Berg, 2017). However, the cultural proximity concept is not fully applicable to explain the popularity of transnational cultural products in Indonesia. For instance, Chua (2012) points out that cultural proximity meets its practical problem when Korean television dramas are also popular in Indonesia. He further emphasizes that Indonesia does not have East Asian "heritage." The audiences' reasons for consuming media content vary with local audiences' social identities, sense of belonging, shared histories, and experiences. Several local cultural products have a cultural closeness to local audiences, but the audiences are not interested in watching or consuming these products. In Indonesia, several local films are not successful in attracting many Indonesian viewers.

Although there is a similarity of physical appearances between Thailand and Indonesian people as represented in films, young Indonesian Muslims understand that they have a distinct religious identity. Wati, an informant, said "We have different religions...I think Thailand people are mostly Buddhists, while we are Muslims. However, there are some cultural similarities between Thailand and Indonesians. Maybe because we are the same Southeast Asian people" (Wati, personal communication, 24 February 2019).

Religious identity difference, however, does not stop these young Muslims from consuming Thai films. On the contrary, the religious difference sometimes provokes these young Muslims to consume these films. Muslim youth consume Thailand cultural products that depict elements of "foreignness" and at the same time "proximate" with Islamic values. They search these cultural products on the internet and then consume them. They enjoy these cultural products, even though the language used is different from their language. The rise of Thai films in Indonesia coexists side-by-side with Islamic teachings' propagation by local Islamic organizations and Islamic educational institutions. The youth still attend Islamic teachings in their classroom, but they also engage with these cultural products. They follow what their Islamic teachers say, but they also enjoy consuming these films through their mobile phones and laptops. They get representations from foreign films as quickly as they get Islamic information in their classes. For young Muslims, consuming Thai films does not reduce their religiosity through their representation is different from Islamic values. Sinta, an informant, stated: "I understand the 'strange' story, which is unusual in the Indonesian context. The presence of Buddhist monks in the film is not available in our environment. However, this does not stop me from consuming it. It is only for entertainment, not to be followed. By watching this, I can refresh my mind because I rarely go to the cinema to watch films" (Sinta, personal communication, 15 February 2019).

As a country with a similar culture, even though it cannot be called the same, people in these two countries tend to believe in magical things. Culturally, Indonesian people believe in the presence of a mystical world that coexists with their lives. For some Indonesians, a particular phenomenon cannot be logically understood since the supernatural world controls it. The common belief in society toward the bizarre world's existence has encouraged the emergence of cultural products on supernatural themes such as ghost-themed films and mystical-themed soap operas in Indonesia.

This can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s, in which Indonesian horror films were screened in cinemas (Heeren, 2012). Therefore, a genre of Thai film consumed by young Muslim audiences in Indonesia is ghost-themed films.

A ghost Thailand film titled “Buppah Rahtree 3.1: Rahtree Reborn” is a Thai film consumed by young Indonesian Muslims. This film tells the story of a young man named Rung (Mario Maurer), who decides to live in a haunted apartment named Oscar. Rung accidentally meets Buppha (Laila Boonyasak), his former teacher, when he was still in school. Rung liked Buppha for a long time, and he had confessed his love for her, but they separated without news in the end. After being reunited, Rung was thrilled and then asked Buppha to be his tutor, but Buppha refused. Meanwhile, J'Sam's apartment owner (Chantana Kittiyapan) and his colleague turn his apartment into an illegal gambling house. After receiving this information, the police went straight to the location and investigated around the apartment. During the ambush, several polices who were assigned were terrorized by the ghosts who inhabited the apartment. One of the terrors comes from a ghost of a child who lives in room 609 named Pla. Play, along with the previous ghost spirit, Rahtree terrorized everyone in Oscar's apartment to avenge the treatment of people who had hurt them to death. After consuming this film, an Informant named Anto argued: “Yes, I found differences. A Buddhist religious figure is present in this film, but he is not a hero to make the ghost lose. It is different from Indonesian films. In several Indonesian films, Kiai is usually present to defeat the ghost” (Anto, personal communication, 5 March 2019).

In this case, one identifies the different representations between Thai films and Indonesian ones. Both films depict religious figures or leaders; however, the latter portrays religious figures differently. The Thailand film titled “Buppah Rahtree 3.1: Rahtree Reborn” actually also exposes a Buddhist monk as the protagonist. However, in the film, he cannot defeat the ghost. However, in Indonesian films, a religious figure, especially Kiai (religious

figure in Indonesian Islam), is depicted to defeat the ghost. Commonly, the Kiai is given a short slot in the film, especially at the end of the film. He is represented by a male figure who has solid religious knowledge. Using some verses of the Qur'an (a holy book in Islam), he easily defeated the ghost. In the Indonesian context, religious figures in Indonesian films are related to government control and commercial interest. Therefore, a horror film should portray the Kiai (religious figure in Indonesian Islam) as a hero (Heeren, 2007, pp. 214–215).

However, Indonesian culture before the arrival of Islam was influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions. This can be seen from the building of Buddhist temples, which can still be traced today in Indonesia's regions. The arrival of Islam did not even eliminate the people's culture or traditions influenced by Hindu and Buddhist teachings. Islam in Indonesia has different characteristics from Islam in the Middle East, which is where Islam emerged. Geertz (2013) calls it syncretic Javanese Islam. Picard (2011, p. 8) states that Islam in Indonesia is “...as superficial veneer, underneath which endured a syncretic indigenous and Hindu-Buddhist heritage.” One tradition that is still strong in Indonesian society is their belief in the existence of ghosts. In Indonesia, the term ghost is mentioned in various terms, such as *dedemit*, *gender-owo*, and *sundel bolong*.

Indonesian Muslim youth could distinguish some elements in their consumption of Thai films that are different from what they viewed in Western films. In the Thai film titled Buppah Rahtree 3.1: Rahtree Reborn, the love story depicted does not share matters of sexuality as much as that in Western cultural products. The love story which began and ended is very similar to Indonesian youth culture. Nadia stated: “The film portrays a love story different from anything that I have ever seen in Western films. The story mainly depicts the love relationship, which does not portray sexuality. Even though their fashions do not reflect Islamic values but their supernatural beliefs, to some extent, do not contradict our culture.

These fashions are also used even in Indonesian television dramas” (Nadia, personal communication, 17 April 2019).

Based on the above statement, young Indonesian Muslims consider Western cultural products not to have cultural closeness like Thai films. This clearly shows that the media’s globalization encourages a plurality of foreign cultural products that come to Indonesia. This diversity of cultural products creates opportunities for young Muslims to choose cultural products close to their culture.

However, assuming young Muslim Indonesian audiences as passive audiences is a view that needs correction. Indonesian Young Muslims negotiate representations of Thai films. As a product of foreign culture, they understand that several features in the film are different from their daily habits and traditions. They considered that watching Thai films can open their understanding of the cultural diversity inherent in human civilization in the world. World civilization is not necessarily monopolized by Western civilization. Many other world civilizations need to be studied. Desi, an informant, said “I love watching Thai films. From those films, I saw the diversity of human culture in this world. So far, foreign films are Hollywood films, Hong Kong films, or films from South Korea, as far as I know. Films such as Thailand are not inferior in quality to films from these countries” (Desi, personal communication, 26 May 2019).

Furthermore, media globalization has encouraged the diversity of transnational cultural products in Indonesia. This diversity creates an opportunity to understand young Indonesian Muslims that no culture is essentially genuine. For example, when they watch Thai films, they notice some Thai customs similar to their daily traditions or habits. Siska, an informant, stated: “Through Thai films, I learned about Thailand’s traditional fashions. The traditional clothes they wear are similar to our clothes” (Siska, personal communication, 6 March 2019).

In this context, the emergence of various foreign cultural products encourages the inclusiveness

of understanding Muslim youth in Indonesia. Their openness to cultural products such as Thai films encourages them to negotiate representation in Thai films with their Islamic piety. This negotiation, in turn, created Muslim heterogeneity (Nasir, 2016, p. 2) in Indonesia. Riska, an informant, said “I see Thai films as having exemplary values. In the film *Buppah Rahtree 3.1: Rahtree Reborn*, I see the values of rationality that need to be developed in Indonesia. I saw in the film that religious verses could not entirely defeat the ghost. Buddhist religious figures alone cannot defeat ghosts. In Indonesian films, *Hantu* cannot lose to religious figures” (Riska, personal communication, 11 March 2019)

During my observation, I notice that when they watch Thai films, Muslim youths compare with Indonesian films. This comparison is made to assess the reality of the Muslim community in Indonesia that tends to solve supernatural problems such as ghosts by using religious verses. Often religion is used as a solution to solve various problems, including the ghost problem. The criticism conveyed by the informant above shows that young Indonesian Muslims today are trying to translate Islamic teachings contextually independently. Their translation of Islamic teachings is influenced by the teachings of the scriptures and religious authorities (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 8) and their consumption practices of foreign cultural products.

Islamic values are thus not static but are constantly changing. This change is influenced by the interaction of Muslims with various cultures that come from outside. The globalization of the media creates an active dialogue between cultural producers and cultural recipients. This active dialogue enables the creation of “hybrid cultures, in which different values, beliefs, and practices have become deeply entwined” (Thompson, 1995, p. 170).

Besides, dramatically, the globalization of the media creates opportunities for the active interaction of the audience. Muslim youth in Indonesia can freely choose cultural products from various countries. Thus, the reception of young Indonesian Muslims for Thai films is influenced by the ease of

access resulting from today's rapid technological developments. They can easily watch Thai films on their mobile phones or laptops. The broad internet network encourages their active involvement in this consumption practice. Free access to Thai films via YouTube is an essential factor in young Muslims' involvement in consuming Thai cultural products.

Conclusion

The practice of consuming Thai cultural products by young Indonesian Muslims shows that they are active audiences. In this article, the active position of Muslim youth as audiences can be seen from two pieces of evidence. The first evidence is based on their consumption practice or habit. Muslim youth tend to watch Thai films on YouTube or other free sites on the internet through laptops and smartphones. The rise of new digital supports the more active engagement of young Muslim audiences in Indonesia.

The second evidence is based on their negotiation on representations of Thai films. They choose to watch or consume Thai films because this film provides some representations close to their culture on the one hand and foreign representations on the other hand. The proximate and foreign cultural element is inherently present in every product of foreign culture. Therefore, the practice of consuming Thai films by young Indonesian Muslims shows that global cultural products can become an arena for cultural dialogue between audiences and producers. This cultural dialogue can encourage the creation of a cosmopolitan Muslim generation that is not exclusive. The exposure to foreign culture, which is being strengthened due to the media's globalization today, is thus a blessing for the Muslim community in Indonesia.

As a result, this study recommends two points. First, in this global era, the restrictions of consumption on foreign cultural products, both from religious and state authority, are unnecessary. This is because audiences can select and negotiate representations of cultural products. Second, television stations need to provide a new medium in which audiences can actively select the television

programs based on their own schedule, not a fixed schedule decided by the television producer. Furthermore, the acceptance of young Muslims toward Thai films shows the openness of the Muslim community in Indonesia to cultural products from foreign countries. This acceptance strengthens Indonesian society's tradition several centuries ago in which they were open to interacting with other communities through trade. Other studies related to the reception of young Indonesian Muslims to cultural products from other "peripheral" countries like the Philippines and Malaysia need to be carried out in the future.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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